WHIRRAKEE

March 2010 Vol. 31 No. 2

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO

FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Bob Ruddick, Ben Goonan, Liz Graham, Glenise Moors, Joy Clusker, Gemma Candy

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one sub-group (the Fauna Study Group) and is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.

Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5449 3479 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5449 3479.
To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 31, No. 2, March 2010

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
Making notes and sharing observations about the natural world is our core business, and Glenise Moors is one of those field naturalist who excel at this. I read with much pleasure Glenise's detailed observation of a two consecutive mornings at their dam and wished we had more such contributions…
If you are not doing anything this weekend, why not go the campout at Wedderburn organised by the Victorian Field Naturalists Club. See notice on page 3 and back cover.

Front Page Illustration – **Photographer: Karen Thomas'** family of choughs have grown this year from 8 to 13 … and they are all in that tree!

Short Notices

An interesting excursion this weekend
The Field Naturalist Club of Victoria is having a campout at the Bush Heritage Property near Wedderburn on the Labour Day weekend. They will be doing some reptile and bat trapping. For more details contact Sally Disher on 9752 1418

Anne Bridley has been to this property. It is on the NW side of Mt Korong, has some old trees and a lot of ground litter. She said there was good birding the day she was there.

Our BFNC Garden is worth saving

All gardens require more than basic maintenance from time to time. Our garden is now over 15 years old and a close look at it reveals that it now needs some clever gardening to improve the health and appearance of its plants.
To address this problem, BFNC and Australian Native Plants Group members are invited to attend a short meeting to plan ways we can restore our garden at:

BFNC clubrooms

Friday March 19 at 6:45 pm

If you are interested but cannot attend please contact Jan Orr (54435668)

The first garden working-bee for 2010 will be held on:
Saturday March 27 from 9:00 - 11:00 am

Matthew Comer - BFNC garden coordinator
Jan Orr - BFNC president

Field Naturalists Club of Victoria Environment Fund – Call for Grant Applications

Funds are available for projects of between $200 and $1000, which are in the areas of environmental research, dissemination of information on the natural environment or biodiversity preservation.

Enquiries: Hali ph 9877 9860,
email admin@fncv.org.au
Applications close April 16th.

March General Meeting Preview
Presenter: Paul Foley (Bendigo Astronomical Society)

Title: 'Astronomy'. Paul will bring along telescopes for a hands-on session before, after or during the presentation.

February Front Cover Photo
I am very pleased that Rod Orr was able to identify the moth on the front cover of the February *Whirrakee* as *Crypsiphona occultaria*. Rod said that there are a couple of very nice photos of it in D'Abrera, B. *Moths of Australia*, P. 18, P. 57). Their underwings are apparently beautifully coloured. They often come to lighted windows when their underside is easily seen - worth looking out for!
Thanks Rod.

Images still needed for next BFNC publication
In 2008 Darren Green provided the *Whirrakee* with pictures, descriptions and notes about the frogs and reptiles of the Bendigo area. With the help of Dale Gibbons, these have now been revised and compiled into a book, similar to the other books published by the Bendigo FNC. The City of Greater Bendigo has provided some funds towards the publication of the book. We are now sending sections of the book to experts to check for errors, omissions, improvements, etc. before it is printed.

We have a very good collection of pictures from Darren Green, some from Dale Gibbons, and other herpetologists, however, we need a few more pictures that are close-ups showing important characteristics of the species. If you have pictures of the following, please get in touch with Bill Holsworth, ph: 5443 4063
Any of the BLIND SNAKES Typhlopidae, especially the WOODLAND BLIND SNAKE *Ramphotyphlops proximus* and GRAY'S BLIND SNAKE *Ramphotyphlops nigrescens.*
Also, the BLACK ROCK SKINK *Egernia saxatilis* and the MALLEE SPADEFOOT TOAD *Neobatrachus pictus.*

Slides or digital photos are required.
Thank you for your help.

DVDs available for borrowing
Diana Collier has two DVDs, that she is happy to lend. Please contact Diana (ph. 5443 0137), *if interested in viewing them.*
The DVD *Rainforest: the secret of life* is available for loan from the BFNC library.
There is also a DVD on Climate Change, which is a *Sisters on the Planet* production. This DVD is part of *Make poverty history series* of OXFAM;
For a description of these DVDs, please see page 3 of the February *Whirrakee.*

Notes and observations from the February General Meeting (plus a few extras)

Anne Bridley
Hobby (1), carpenter St Spring Gully, seen three times since mid December 09.
Chestnut rumped heathwren, heard south of Spring Gully reservoir, evening of 3/2/10
Surprised swamp wallaby scared off by cat, Carpenter St. Spring Gully Dec. 09
Rainbow lorikeets, small group, Carpenter St. Spring Gully Dec-Feb.
Anne has observed more small birds in her garden at Spring Gully (Yellow thornbill, Striated and brown thornbill, wrens, red-browed firetail) than her previous bush block at Junortoun.

Elvyne Hogan, Shelbourne East
Flock of 15 rainbow bee-eaters and large flock of white browed woodswallows, 5 white-browed babblers and only 1 yellow tufted honeyeater.

Ian Magee
Second hand report of one adult and one immature platypus in Bendigo Creek downstream of Bendigo. Ian is awaiting a written report.

Glenise Moors
Glenise described observations made on early mornings at her dam. Birds visited in a sequence from yellow faced honeyeater, wattlebirds, brown headed and fuscous honey-eaters displaying a range of behaviours. She has observed red browed finches and crimson rosellas of differing plumages ie; ages. She has also observed yellow thornbills (see more detailed observations below)

Peter Ellis
Two Rainbow Lorikeets were sitting up in the very top of his Ironbark on the night of 11th February, during and after the downpour. Canoodling away they were. Having aligned them with the call, Peter thinks they were around the week before.

Margaret Kane
Margaret brought to the meeting a beautifully constructed bird's nest. It was made up from tiny sticks and must have fallen out of a tree in the children's playground opposite her home in Flora Hill.

And here some more wonderful and very detailed observations...

The Morning Watch
by Glenise Moors

22 January 2010
I sat at the far end of our dam to watch bird activity from 7:45 to 9:30 am. There was a slight breeze and it was very warm so I expected many birds to drink before the day became hot.

I disturbed 5 immature plumaged (more green than red) Crimson Rosellas as I arrived. Yellow-faced, Fuscous, and Brown-headed Honeyeaters were 'dunking' into water. Fuscous, Brown-headed and a young Red Wattlebird drank from the edge. Spotted Pardalotes, Yellow Thornbills, Scarlet Robin (immature male), Brown Thornbill, Grey Shrike-thrush (female) and 2 rabbits came in to drink. A male Common Bronzewing took a big drink then went back up bank to 'fight'? with another male and a female. They circled around with their heads almost touching and wings flapping 'in time'. This display lasted about 5 minutes before they flew away. I haven't seen them doing this before. Five White-winged Choughs came to drink and dig up muddy leaves a few inches from the water edge. They appeared to be extracting food from it. Three were adults with red eyes, two were younger with reddish-brown eyes and one was smaller and younger still with dark eyes. Next a group of four Red-browed Finches came to drink - 2 adults and 4 young ones (2 of these had red edges to their black bills and 2 had black bills – none of these had red brows). Two adult Red Wattlebirds did big 'dunks' in the middle of the dam and the single young one tried a quick 'dunk' quite close to the edge. A White-throated Treecreeper came for a quick drink. A couple of Grey Fantails flitted and pranced – I think they had a drink before eventually bathing near the edge. Three Superb Fairy-wrens drank from the edge – the male is losing some of his blue now. He had 2 females with him.

Around the dam in the eucalypts and cassinias, Yellow Thornbills, Eastern Spine-bills, Mistletoebirds, Weebills, and Striated Thornbills were calling as they fed. I watched several Silvereyes extricate insects from the bark of a dead Black Wattle. Several Crimson Rosellas came to chew buds from eucalypts. Four Kookaburras hung around – 2 were young and noisy, making 'hoarra-hoarra' sounds like a car trying to start. Three Black-faced Cuckoo-shrikes flew over – one had very tattered wing feathers. Several Striated Pardalotes were feeding in the foliage. One pair has young ready to leave the drill-hole nest in the lounge-room wall, another pair have just started taking tiny food into the nest-box near the kitchen window and another 'little trooper' is sitting in the nest-box in the carport. I think she must have addled eggs as she has been there for weeks and we don't see any activity. I open the end of the box sometimes to see if the bird is still there and it stares back at me but doesn't get off. A Sulphur-crested Cockatoo flew to drink but decided I was too scary.

Further away still, I heard or saw Long-billed Corellas, Australian Raven, Galahs, and Grey Currawong.

Back at the house I found four White-throated Treecreepers – two were giving continuous trilling calls. Three or four Brown Treecreepers were investigating a hollow log, then a dead tree for insects and five Superb Fairy-wrens bounced across near the tanks. (The same 3 from the dam plus another female and an eclipse plumaged male). A Sacred Kingfisher came for a while and I could hear Dusky Woodswallows from our kitchen at 10:30. Each day the White-browed Scrub-wrens hop around our windows and the carport looking for insects. There were three today.

23 January 2010

Observations from near our dam from 8:25 to 9:05 am. There was a moderate breeze with 1/8 cloud cover. It was 16 degrees C.

The first bird I saw come for a drink was the female Grey Shrike-thrush – she is sitting in our carport. I was surprised to see a Brown Treecreeper have a drink. I had good views of the immature plumaged male Scarlet Robin as it drank and bathed, then moved around the dam preening in various trees – he is not beautiful! I was also excited to have two Eastern Yellow Robins – they only had drinks. A group of Brown-headed Honeyeaters danced about doing quick edge-dunks then settling briefly to drink. About 6 Fuscous Honeyeaters drank, then dunked a bit further from the edge before returning to the cassinia to preen. A Brown Thornbill drank from the edge in the lee of a stick a few times, followed by a small group of Yellow Thornbills. The latter also splashed around in the water before preening in the cassinia shrubs. Yellow-faced Honeyeaters flew from the shrubs to dunk, but

I didn't see them drink today. Two female Superb Fairy-wrens had a drink and a group of Red-browed Finches came – one had a black bill with an enlarged cream gape (a little younger than the one yesterday?) and the other 4 had full adult plumage. A lone White-browed Scrubwren hopped sneakily down to the dam to get insects.
Later on around the dam, I noticed a pale plumaged Eastern Spinebill but it kept to the shrubs. The Rufous Whistler fed in the trees, as did the group of Yellow Thornbills, a couple of Brown Thornbills, Silvereyes, Spotted and Striated Pardalotes. The trees are a mixture of Grey Box, River Red Gum, Black Wattle and one Cherry Ballart. No rosellas were seen or heard today.
Other birds heard from where I sat were Magpie, Grey Currawong, Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, Galah, Australian Raven, Grey Fantail, White-throated Tree-creeper and Long-billed Corella. I heard a honeyeater 'warning call' from the adjacent National Park but I didn't see any bird of prey come through. These are not obvious lately.

February General Meeting – Speaker: David Cameron: 'Conservation status of the Victorian Flora'

David Cameron is one of Victoria's most experienced botanists. During his long career, he has worked for the Forest Commission, the Conservation Council, the Department of Sustainability and Environment and its various predecessors, and he is currently employed at the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research. Over the years, his work has involved rainforest management and conservation, producing field guides, large-scale monitoring programmes, looking at impact of fires and other (threatening) processes and training. Amongst many other things, David is the curator of a comprehensive flora database and very much involved with pinpointing threatened species.

Whilst working his way through the flora database, David has begun to apply the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) red list categories for threatened species. The talk David gave to the club was to give us an update of this approach.

Victoria is unique amongst Australia's states in that it is the most disturbed environment. About two thirds of the state is affected by agricultural development and our landscape health, almost everywhere, suffers the highest stress level. It is not surprising that much work on threatened plants has been carried out here.

David took us through the history of listings of threatened plant species in Victoria: Jim Willis was really the first to make up such a listing between 1975 and 1978. He gave 518 taxa (out of a total of 2499) a status ranging from presumed extinct to extremely rare and locally rare or endangered.
Then, Cliff Beauglehole, when working for the Land Conservation Council between 1979 and 1988, surveyed in great depth, 13 areas in the state and published a report about each area. In the 1980s, Parson and Scarlett concentrated on rare species in grassy woodlands. In 1995 Briggs and Leigh introduced the categories endangered, vulnerable, rare and poorly known (apart form extinct).

Another process that results in listings of endangered plants is a legislative one. Through the Flora and Fauna Guarantee (FFG) Act of 1988, 530 taxa of flora and fauna are listed as threatened in Victoria, including 302 plant taxa. This Act also covers whole communities as well as potentially threatening processes. The above Act was supplemented by the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act of 1999, which came up with a list of extinct (6), critically endangered (3), endangered (48) and vulnerable (98) flora. Gullan, Cheal and Walsh in their definitive publication 'Rare or Threatened Plants in Victoria' came up with a new category of 'depleted'. All up 866 indigenous plant taxa were classified as rare or worse (VROTS).

David began to work on this list and closely looked at the taxa listed and their conservation status. Considering known sub-species and sub-populations, he doubled the number of Victorian rare and threatened plants to 1732 taxa, when compiling an advisory list in 2003.

At this stage, at least two lists existed and this was confusing (and diffusing) the issue of plant conservation.
In 2001, David began to apply the IUCN red list criteria for classifying plants into the various rare and endangered categories and the current, most up to date list uses these international criteria.

The results, when using VROTS versus IUCN criteria, are not dramatically different, but the latter pick up more species. In 2005, the first publication (by Backhouse and Cameron) using this new approach dealt with Victorian orchids.
The (alarming) results for 372 Victorian orchids were, that 11 are extinct, 79 are critically endangered, 26 are endangered, 92 are vulnerable and 8 are near threatened. In total, 132 taxa were categorised as 'of least concern' and for 24 taxa our data is deficient, so they could belong into any of the above categories.
Thus the overall result when using the IUCN criteria, is that 65% of Victorian orchids raise some sort of conservation concern.

The parameters drawn upon for the IUCN list include extent of occurrence, degree of habitat and population fragmentation, population and sub-population size as well as number of locations. Importantly, they also include generation time and as well as dispersal mode and whether or not populations and environmental parameters are subject to extreme fluctuations.

David then went on to illustrate the situation with some case studies. The first one was about sphagnum bogs at the western end of the alpine system at Storm Creek. The bog, an increasingly rare environment due to fire, drought and other direct human influences, contains four species of sphagnum moss, but none is listed by VROTS or is on the FFG list. However, on the new list, using IUCN criteria, these taxa now have some status and this reflects the continuing decline and poor regenerative capacity of this habitat.

The other two case studies concerned Wallaby grasses and emu bushes. None (or few) are listed by on the FFG list and very few by VROTS. However, using the new criteria, a rather more alarming picture emerges.

Today, 2032 plants (about half of the Victorian flora) have been assessed using the IUCN criteria. Of these
50 (3%) are extinct,
486 (24%) are critically endangered
340 (17%) are endangered,
391 (19%) are vulnerable,
147 (7%) are near-threatened,
531 (26%) are of least concern and for
87 (4%) we have insufficient data

This means, that according to these criteria, more than 60% of the Victorian flora is in a threatened category.

David ended his talk with some brief examples of the resultant categories for a number of different species, ranging form very common pest species to one of which there is only a single specimen known.

Comments by the audience expressed dismay that our flora should be in such a threatened state.
The question that kept coming up in my mind for the rest of that night was, how should spend our conservation dollar? It is very worrying to find that over 60% of our flora is threatened. While on one hand it is helpful that the new IUCN red list criteria resolve the difference between threatened plants more finely and alert managers much earlier to their insecure future, what can be done with this information, given that the conservation dollar is finite? Apply pressure for more money? Distribute it differently? Perhaps members might like to comment on this issue…?

SEANA 2010 Autumn Camp

The Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat invites you to attend the SEANA Autumn Camp which will be based at Pax Hill Activity and Conference Centre (Scout Camp), 450 Spencer Street, Ballarat East, at the corner of Spencer and Fussell Street, 5km southeast of the city centre.

Bunkhouse accommodation is available at Pax Hill with breakfast and dinner in the dining room and packed lunches. Amenity blocks at Pax Hill are separate nearby buildings. Two options are available: from Friday night to Sunday or Monday Lunch (dinner will not be available on Friday night).

Alternatively, field naturalists may wish to book their own accommodation from the wide range available in Ballarat. Some of the closer caravan parks and motels are listed below. You should make your own bookings as soon as possible as a girls' soccer tournament is being held in Ballarat on this weekend. The registration fee for those organising their own accommodation includes dinner on Saturday and Sunday nights but you will have to organise your own breakfast and lunch.

Program

Friday 19 March
Registration from 4.30pm onwards at Pax Hill. Tea and coffee will be available at Pax Hill all weekend. BYO mug please. Evening meal – make your own arrangements.
7pm Welcome in dining room followed by an introduction to the local flora and fauna by FNCB members.
Copies of *Wattles of Ballarat* recently published by FNCB will be available to purchase at $12.

Saturday 20 March
Meet at Pax Hill for half and full day excursions.
Morning excursions will leave at 9am and afternoon excursions will leave at 1.30pm
Dinner at 6.00pm
7.30pm SEANA AGM and General meeting including a time to discuss what is happening at your club and the future role of SEANA.

Sunday 21 March
Meet at Pax Hill for half and full day excursions as for Saturday.
Those unable to stay until Monday depart in the afternoon.
Dinner at 6.00pm for those staying until Monday.
7.30 pm Guest speaker, Ern Perkins, Castlemaine FNC and Australian Natural History Medallion winner in 2008 will speak on "Monitoring Change in Natural Ecosystems".

Monday 22 March
The excursion program will continue on Monday morning for those able to stay.
Depart for home after lunch.

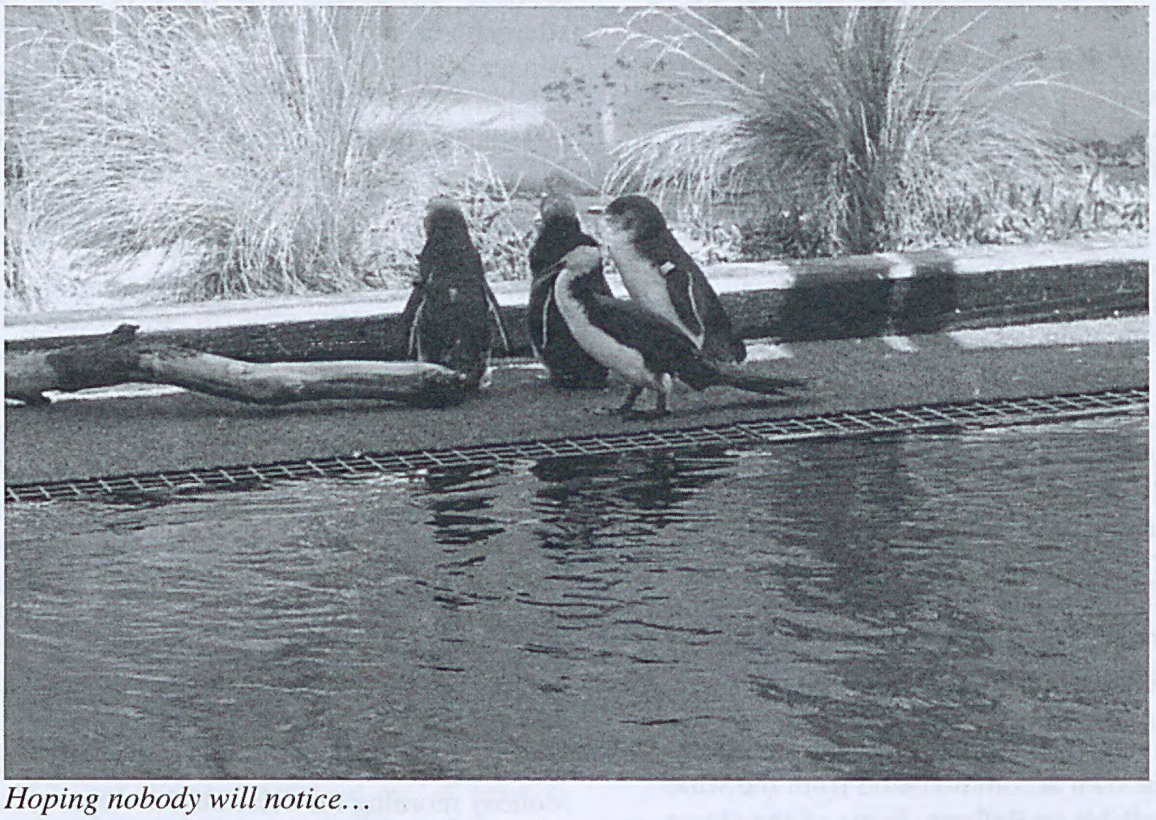
Depending on seasonal conditions, excursions are planned to include geology, mining history, grasslands, bushland, mineral springs, Lake Wendouree (wet or dry) and whatever else is interesting.

Tourist Information
Details of caravan parks and motels were available in the February *Whirrakee*.

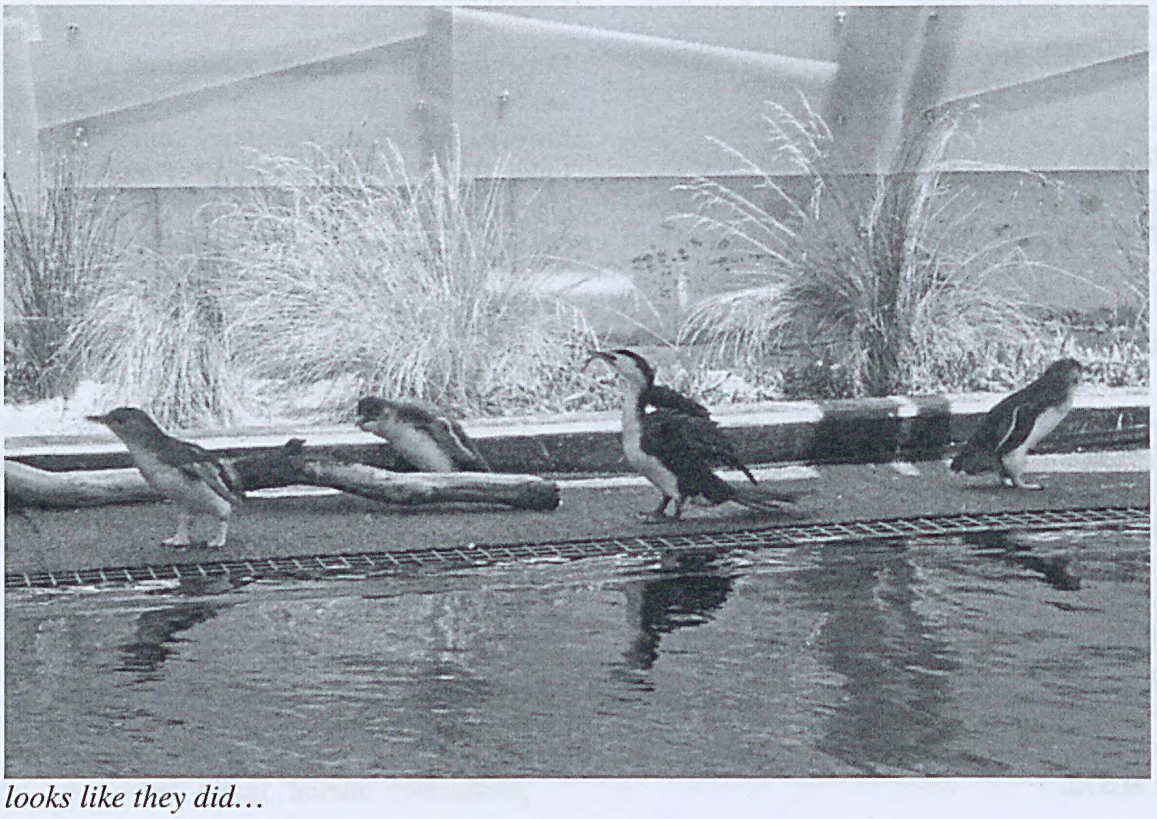
Further information about the SEANA Autumn 2010 Camp can be obtained from:
Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat, PO Box W328, Ballarat West 3350
John Gregurke, 03 5339 4993,
jgregurke1@bigpond.com
Peter Dalman. 03 5339 2777,
pdalman@netconnect.com.au

A day at the zoo Photographers: Rod and Jan Orr

We noticed this Little Pied Cormorant mingling with the Little Fairy Penguins at the Melbourne Zoo when we visited a couple of weeks ago



Hoping nobody will notice…



looks like they did…

who me?

Speakers for BFNC General Meetings, March till June 2010

Date	Speaker	Title
10/3/10	Paul Foley, Bendigo District Astronomical Society	"Astronomy" (including telescope viewing)
14/4/2010	Doug Frood, Pathways Bushland and Environment	"Grassy Woodland Restoration"
12/5/2010	Peter Marriott, Entomological Society of Victoria	"Moths of Victoria"
9/6/2010	Professor Andrew Bennett, Deakin University	"Revegetation in farm land-scapes: are there benefits for wildlife?"

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meetings

Wednesday, March 10 **7.30pm**
Paul Foley will be talking Astronomy at the March meeting, and he will also bring some telescopes for viewing the night sky.

Wednesday, April 14 **7.30pm**
Doug Frood, (Pathways Bushland and Environment) will talk about 'Grassy Woodland Restoration'

Excursions

The Great Dividing Trail Flora & Fauna Mapping excursion will continue in 2010. Watch this space.
Contact for any further detail: Anne Bridley 55493479. For a summary of observed fauna and flora along the trail so far, see page 5ff of the December *Whirrakee*.

Contact Richard Goonan (0423 418 815) if you have comments, questions or suggestions for any other excursions.

Fauna Group

This group normally meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm. New and seasoned Club members are most welcome to attend.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

There are two important BFNC garden meetings this month

Dates: 19th March and 27th March

See page 3 for details

VFNC campout at Wedderburn

The Field Naturalist Club of Vic is having a campout at the Bush Heritage Property near Wedderburn on the Labour Day weekend. They will be doing some reptile and bat trapping. For more details contact Sally Disher on 9752 1418.

SEANA Autumn Camp 2010 (19-22 March)

See page 8 for a detailed description of the program.

Australian Naturalists' Network – Advance Notice

Sixth ANN Get-together
24 August - 4 September 2010
Host: Chinchilla FNC, Qld
Second Notice:
to reserve a place, the expression of interest form and a deposit of $200 should be sent to the CFNC by 1/12 2009.
Further enquiries: Kath Truscott, email: ann2010@bordernet.com.au

SEANA 2010 (15 - 18 October)

Advance Notice - based at Foster (Camp Rhumba), Wilsons Promontory Excursions planned.